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Accepted: *Linguistic Variation*

I'm done my homework- Case assignment in a stative passive*

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Abstract

We present an analysis of an understudied construction found in Philadelphia and Canadian English, and also in certain Vermont varieties. In this construction, the participle of certain verbs can appear along with a form of the verb *be* and a DP complement, producing strings like *I'm done my homework*, *I'm finished my fries*, and (in Vermont) *I'm started the project*. We show that the participle in the construction is an adjectival passive, not a perfect construction. We further argue that the internal argument DP in the construction is receiving Case from the adjectival head *a*, similar to what happens in all English dialects with the adjective *worth*, and that the internal argument is interpreted via a mechanism of complement coercion. The microparametric variation we find across English dialects with respect to the availability of this construction is accounted for by variation in the selectional restrictions on the *a* head.

Keywords: adjective, Canadian English, Case assignment, English dialect syntax, microvariation, Philadelphia English, stative passive, Vermont English

1. Introduction

We present an analysis of an underdescribed construction common to Canadian, Philadelphian, and Vermont English, exemplified in (1).

(1) I'm {done/finished} my homework.

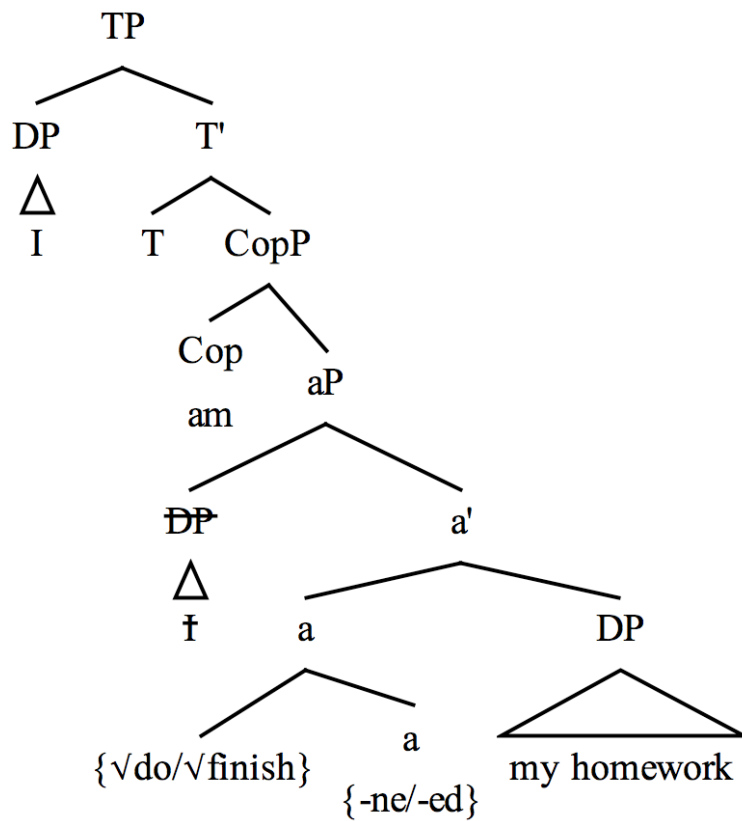
This construction appears to involve an instance of the copula/passive auxiliary *be*, a participial form of *finish* or *do* (or even *start* for some Vermont speakers), and a DP complement receiving accusative case. While fully productive and non-idiomatic in dialects that allow it (see Yerastov (2008) for a description and discussion of its

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geographical distribution), this construction is ungrammatical in most dialects of British and American English, including the standard varieties. This observation raises a question for comparative syntax to which we will attempt to provide an answer, namely, what is the (micro)parameter that differentiates dialects that allow (1) from those that do not, and what is the locus of this variation? The construction in (1), henceforth the *done my homework* construction, also raises a number of problems for the theory of DP-licensing and argument structure, including (i) what is the category of the phrase headed by the participle?; (ii) where is the external argument (*I* in example (1)) introduced?; (iii) given the apparently passive structure, how is the internal argument (*my homework* in (1)) licensed-i.e. in the terms of traditional Case theory, where does the internal argument's accusative Case come from?¹; (iv) why is this construction lexically restricted to the participles of *do*, *finish*, and (in some regions) *start*? Our analysis will be couched in the Minimalist Program of syntactic theory (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001), supplemented by certain assumptions taken from Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz 1993; Marantz 1997; Embick 2004a&b). In particular, we will argue that the structure for a sentence like (1) is as given in (2).

¹ Henceforth, we will use the terminology of traditional Case theory (Chomsky 1981; Vergnaud 1977) when discussing the licensing of the internal argument in the *done my homework* construction. This is for convenience only- as far as we can see, our approach is entirely compatible with conceptions of licensing which do not contain any notion of abstract Case, and which deny that morphological case has any connection to licensing (e.g., the Dependent Case theory of Marantz 1991 and much subsequent work). Substituting the words “phi-licensing” whenever we make reference to Case-assignment will not change any of the fundamentals of our argument.

(2) Structure of the *done my homework* construction



Our answers to puzzles (i)-(iv) can therefore be summarized as follows. In answer to (i), we will argue that the construction involves a stative adjectival passive participle, rather than a full eventive passive or an active past participle in a perfect construction. A corollary of this is that the construction involves no external-argument-introducing Voice head which would standardly be taken to assign accusative Case in an

ordinary transitive structure (Kratzer 1996).² Our answer to puzzle (ii) will therefore be that the external argument is not introduced in spec-VoiceP (which is absent), but is the subject of the adjectival predicate, and is thus merged as spec-aP. We will argue in response to puzzle (iii) that the Case assignment in this construction is actually coming from an exceptional Case-assigning little-*a* head. Standard dialects also have this head, but in most it is lexically specified to select only one root, namely *worth*. In dialects that allow the *done my homework* construction, this head is further able to select for *do* and *finish*, and additionally *start* in some regions. The lexical specificity of the construction (puzzle (iv)) is thus accounted for by the standard Distributed Morphology mechanism of allowing category-defining heads to have idiosyncratic selection requirements for certain roots.

Our answer to the comparative syntax question with which we opened is then easy to state: the locus of microparametric variation amongst English dialects with respect to the *done my homework* construction is identified as this little-*a* head, and the parameter involved is the selectional properties of that *a* head. Our analysis is thus consonant with what is known as the Borer/Chomsky Conjecture (Borer 1984; Chomsky

² We follow Lundquist (2012) in taking participles to be adjectival in nature. Verbal passives differ from adjectival passives in containing more verbal substructure under the adjectivalizing participial head, including at least a *v* layer and a Voice layer (see also Embick 2004a; Bruening 2013). In not postulating a verbal categorizing head underneath *a* in (2), we depart from Embick's (2004a) assumptions concerning resultative adjectival passives. The rationale for this departure is two-fold. First, note that the verb *do* cannot occur with a DP object in a complement coercion reading, and nor can the verb *do* take *-ing* complements in the same way as the verb *finish* can (i). Nonetheless, the *done* of *done my homework* allows both of these things (ii). This is an argument that participating in the *done my homework* construction is not directly contingent on the root being realizable as a verb (the same point can be made with respect to the adjective *worth*, discussed later).

(i) *I have done (drinking) my beer.

(ii) I am done (drinking) my beer.

The second rationale is that there turns out to be no need, in the case of *done*, *finished*, *etc.* to postulate a 'v' head in order to capture the semantics of the construction- the complement coercion analysis that we propose in 3.3 suffices to capture this without the postulation of such a 'v' head.

1995), the idea that all parametric variation is to be conceptualized as variation in the formal properties of individual functional heads.

The rest of this paper motivates various aspects of the structure in (2), and of our answers to puzzles (i)-(iv), in turn. Section 2 shows that the *done my homework* construction involves a stative adjectival passive participle, rather than an eventive passive or an active participle in a perfect construction. Section 3 defends the non-canonical idea that this construction involves Case-assignment by a little-*a* head. The argument here will be made by process of elimination: we will show that other *prima facie* plausible ideas concerning the origin of this Case (e.g. that there is a silent preposition, a silent verb, or Case-licensing by the copular verb itself) are all ruled out by independent syntactic and semantic properties of the *done my homework* construction. We will argue also that the semantics of the construction are best dealt with as a case of complement coercion, showing how the construction patterns with other instances of complement coercion according to the diagnostics of Pylkkänen (2008). We then go on to discuss various aspects of the lexical specificity of the construction in section 4. Section 5 is a conclusion, which summarizes the account and sets out the space of dialectal variation predicted by it.

2. Done my homework involves a stative adjectival participle

2.1 Done my homework is not a perfect construction

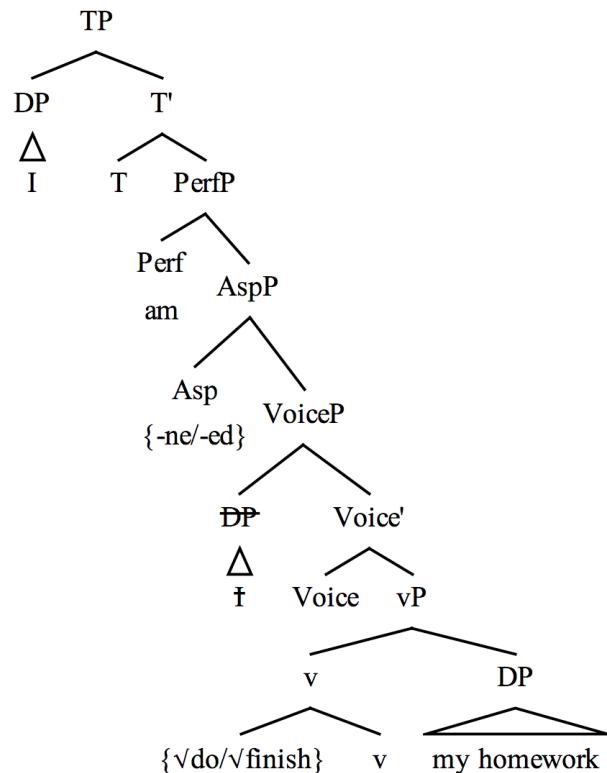
Yerastov (2008, 2012) proposes that *done my homework* is a perfect construction with non-standard auxiliary selection for *be* instead of *have*. The construction would then be

dialectally related to the *be*-perfect of Scots, as illustrated in the following example from Orkney English provided to us by Meredith Tamminga (*personal communication*).

- (3) You'll no be been there afore.
 You'll not have been there before.

On the syntactic assumptions we make, the construction would have the following structure if it were a perfect. In this case, the introduction of the external argument and Case assignment to the internal argument (puzzles (ii) and (iii)) would be completely straightforward- both would be done by Voice in the standard way.

- (4) Hypothetical *be*-perfect structure for *done my homework* (to be rejected)



While we will take no position on whether *done my homework* is related diachronically to the Scots *be* perfect (a plausible scenario given the fact that Scots-speaking settlers populated many of the regions in North America where the construction is found, as Yerastov points out), there are many reasons to reject a synchronic analysis of *done my*

homework as a perfect construction. The first is pointed out by Yerastov (2008:45) himself. It turns out that *done my homework* is compatible with the use of *all* as a degree modifier. This use can be distinguished from the floating quantifier use of *all* by the fact that the latter requires a plural or mass subject, whereas the degree modifier use of *all* has no such requirement. Degree modifier *all* is compatible with adjectives, but not active perfect participles. In this respect, the participle in the *done my homework* construction patterns like an adjective.³

- (5) Degree modification by *all*
- a. I'm all ready for school.
 - b. *I have all done my homework.
 - c. I'm all done my homework.

A second argument that the *done my homework* construction is not a perfect comes from the fact that it can, itself, be embedded in a perfect construction. This is not possible for true perfect constructions: such perfect “doubling” is ungrammatical in all English dialects known to us.

- (6) *Done my homework* can be embedded under a perfect
- a. I have been done my homework for a while now.
 - b. *I have had done my homework for a while now.
 - c. *I am been done my homework for a while now.
 - d. *I am had done my homework for a while now.

Thirdly, perfect participles of transitive verbs are well-known for contrasting with adjectival passive participles (as well as the participles of unaccuatives) in not being able to occur in reduced relative/absolute constructions (Bennis 2004; Belletti & Rizzi 1988; Embick 2004b; many others). Since the participle of a *done my homework* construction is allowed in a reduced relative, we conclude that this cannot be a perfect construction.

- (7) Perfect participles of transitives are ungrammatical in reduced relatives

³ Unless otherwise noted, acceptability judgments are for those dialects which allow *done my homework*.

- a. Would all the students who have eaten their vegetables please stand up?
- b. *Would all the students eaten their vegetables please stand up?

(8) *Done my homework* is grammatical in reduced relatives

- a. Would all the students who are finished their homework please stand up?
- b. Would all the students finished their homework please stand up?

An important prediction of the analysis of *done my homework* as a perfect construction is that it should act as an ordinary transitive in its syntax and semantics—these properties are encoded in the presence of the Voice head in the (to-be-rejected) hypothesized structure in (4). Four diagnostics indicate that this prediction is incorrect, and that therefore there is no transitive Voice head in the *done my homework* construction. Firstly, unlike true *have* perfects, the *done my homework* construction is incompatible with the passive.

(9) True perfects are compatible with the passive

- a. I have done my homework.
- b. My homework has been done.

(10) *Done my homework* cannot be passivized

- a. I am done my homework.
- b. *My homework is been done.

Secondly, agent-oriented modification is not possible in the *done my homework* construction. Other sorts of modification, like degree modification, are possible.

(11) No agent-oriented modifiers

- a. I am completely/nearly/halfway done my homework.
- b. *I am quickly/carefully/intentionally done my homework.

Thirdly, while *finished* and *done* both accept applicative small clause complements in transitive structures, they do not in *done my homework*.

(12) “I have a number of knitting projects going, and...”

- a. I’ve finished [you a scarf].
- b. *I’m finished [you a scarf].

Disallowing applicative small clause complements like this is another property that *done my homework* shares with adjectival passives, as illustrated in (13).

- (13) *John seems given [~~John~~ a book].

Finally, while the semantics of the *done my homework* construction are sometimes compatible with the subject being interpreted as the agent, an agentive interpretation is by no means forced. In this, *done my homework* is very much unlike the perfect or the past tense of ordinary transitive structures featuring Voice with the verbs “do” and “finish”. To see this, consider a scenario in which Commissioner Gordon has just arrested the Joker. The Joker has been terrorizing Gotham City, but with the help of Batman, Gordon has apprehended the Joker before he could put his final act of terror into action. In this context, (14)a is a perfectly appropriate thing for Gordon to say to the Joker, but (14)b is semantically anomalous.

- (14) a. You’re finished your reign of terror.
b. #You(‘ve) finished your reign of terror.

The reason for the semantic anomaly in (14)b is that the agentive entailment of the transitive Voice head clashes with the context, which tells us that it was Gordon, not the Joker, who was the agent in bringing the Joker’s reign of terror to an end. In contrast, (14)a is fine in this context, showing that the subject of the *done my homework* construction is not necessarily an agent, as it would be in a perfect construction with the verbs “do” and “finish”.

We’ve collected acceptability judgments for all of the examples in this subsection from a native *be*-perfect speaker from Shetland (thanks to Elyse Jamieson), as a point of comparison. For their “am done my homework” construction, they reject degree

modification by *all* (5)c, embedding under a perfect (6)a, and inclusion in reduced relatives (8)b. They accept passivization of the construction (10)b, agent oriented modifiers (11), and applicative small clauses (12). They accept both sentences in (14), which is anomalous under any account. In short, for all of the crucial examples where *done my homework* should behave like a perfect, it does behave like a perfect for Shetlandic speakers, and they don't behave like perfects for Philadelphians and Canadians. We make no claims about the historical source of *done my homework* in these two dialects, but it seems clear that they are synchronically quite different, because in Philadelphia and Canada, this construction is not a perfect.

Having shown that the participle in the *done my homework* construction is not a perfect participle, we go on in the next subsection to show that it is not a verbal (eventive) passive participle either.

2.2 *Done my homework is not a verbal (eventive) passive construction*

True eventive passives cannot be embedded directly under verbs like *seem* or *look* (this context is a traditional diagnostic for adjectivehood- see Wasow 1977 and others). In (15) we employ a *by*-phrase in an attempt to force an eventive passive reading of the participle (since *by*-phrases are disfavored in adjectival passives).

- (15) a. *The homework seems finished by John.
 b. *The homework looks finished by John.

The *done my homework* construction is grammatical when embedded under such verbs, showing that it cannot be an eventive passive. For example, a parent might utter either of

the following upon observing that their son John has sat up from his work and put his pen down on the table with an air of finality.⁴

- (16) *Done my homework* can be embedded under *seem*
a. (?) John seems finished his homework.
b. John looks finished his homework.

A second diagnostic that makes it clear that we are not dealing with a verbal, eventive passive here comes from the fact that *by*-phrases are completely disallowed. Returning to the example of Commissioner Gordon arresting the Joker, the following is ungrammatical.

- (17) *You're finished your reign of terror by me.

2.3 Conclusion: *Done my homework* is an adjectival passive construction

Given this construction's incompatibility with diagnostics for active participles and eventive passive participles, and given that the participle distributes like an adjective in many ways (e.g., in allowing degree modification and being embeddable under *seem*), we conclude that *done my homework* involves an adjectival passive participle (answering puzzle (i)). Since the transitive Voice head (and its agentive entailments) is demonstrably absent from this construction, we conclude that the external argument is in fact the subject of a copular construction⁵, of which the participle phrase forms the predicate. In

⁴ Yerastov (2010:29, his 42d and e) reports similar examples as ungrammatical, but we have found multiple Philadelphia speakers who accept them. Insofar as the example in (16)a is slightly awkward to some speakers of Philadelphia English, it is plausible that there is a clash between the relatively elevated register associated with *seem* and the relatively colloquial register associated with the *done my homework* construction. However, Yerastov's reported judgments are shared by a Canadian speaker consulted by the second author (Kelly Jackson pers. comm.). This may indicate that there is a genuine dialectal difference in the acceptability of sentences like (16). Although we do not know why the construction fails the "seem" test for these speakers, it is important to note that this fact does not threaten our broader conclusion concerning the construction, that it is an adjectival passive. This is because the construction patterns with adjectives and against verbs with respect to all of the other diagnostics reported here (such as degree modifier "all").

⁵ An anonymous reviewer makes the very interesting observation that the participle of *the done my homework* construction can be co-ordinated with a progressive participle. As the reviewer points out, this

our structure in (2), this is represented by merging the external argument in spec-aP (answering puzzle (ii)).

In the next section, we address puzzle (iii)--namely, the question of how the internal argument is licensed.

3. Little-a is the Case assigner

The argument in this section will proceed by first considering the more standard sorts of Case-assigners that might have been considered plausible contenders for assigning Case to the internal argument in the *done my homework* construction. We will show that none of them can possibly be present in the construction, given its syntactic properties. By process of elimination, this will lead us to the conclusion that little-*a* is responsible for licensing the internal argument. An anonymous reviewer objects that this line of argumentation is logically fallacious. By rejecting proposals A and B, we can't deductively conclude that proposal C is true. However, the domain of possible proposals is restricted by our syntactic theory, and within this domain we consider and reject all of the other most likely possibilities. Our proposal may not be logically conclusive, but it

seems to cause a problem for our claim that the *be* found in sentences like *I'm done my homework* is the copula, since in cases like the following, it is clearly also acting as the progressive auxiliary. (These examples were provided the reviewer from various newspaper sources.)

(i) We were done work and parking the cube van.

(ii) I would not suggest you move out until you are finished school and working at a stable job.

However, it seems to us that what the reviewer has discovered is part of a broader phenomenon, rather than a problem particular to our structural claims about sentences like *I'm done my homework*. Notice that it is also possible to co-ordinate clear cases of adjectives with progressive participles under *be* (these examples were found on the internet, and are perfectly natural in our judgment).

(iii) We were tired and getting hungry.

(iv) I am happy and working away on things.

The sentences in (i)-(iv) potentially have a number of interesting implications for the syntax of participles and of *be*. For one, it seems that copular *be* and (at least) progressive auxiliary *be* are not distinct elements after all (consonant with this is the well-known fact that even copular *be* undergoes V-to-T movement in English, almost uniquely among "lexical" verbs). Secondly, depending on the proper characterization of the Law of the Co-ordination of Likes, these sentences may indicate that present participles are, in fact, adjectival in some sense (despite the fact that they fail other tests for adjectivehood). It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore these broader issues.

does remain the most likely one after rejecting all of the more likely alternatives. The theory that restricts the domain of possibilities may ultimately be flawed or incomplete, in which case our argumentation would need to be revisited, but in that respect we are no worse off than any other domain of scientific research.

3.1 *There is no null preposition present*

Perhaps the most immediately obvious hypothesis is that the *done my homework* construction is to be related to structures like (18), by substituting a silent preposition (perhaps corresponding to *with*). This silent preposition could then assign Case to the internal argument straightforwardly. This hypothesis is represented as (19) (with capital letters indicating silent elements, following Kayne 2000, 2005, 2011 and related work).

(18) I am {done/finished} with my homework.

(19) I am {done/finished} WITH my homework. (to be rejected)

To judge by metalinguistic commentary on the internet and our own interactions with speakers, many people whose dialects do not allow *done my homework* believe that the construction involves “leaving out” the preposition from (18) in some way.⁶ However, we will now show that neither the semantics nor the syntax of the *done my homework* construction are consistent with the presence of a silent preposition.

The first observation is that the relevant dialects allow (18) alongside the *done my homework* construction, but the two constructions have different ranges of interpretation. The first difference is that (18) allows instrumental readings, whereas *done my homework* does not.

⁶ Consider the following quotation from a blog entry cited by Yerastov (2010:43, his (47)) and still retrievable as of 1st October 2013: “Do you have any friends from Philadelphia who have omitted the preposition ‘with’ from their vocabularies altogether? I.E. instead of saying ‘I’m done with dinner’, they’ll just say, ‘I’m done dinner?’ Does it drive you crazy? Have you murdered them yet? If so, how? Can you tell that this bothers me??!”

- (20) I am done with the computer.
a. OK using the computer
b. OK building the computer

- (21) I am done the computer.
a. *using the computer
b. OK building the computer

The two structures also differ with respect to the understood result state of the complement DP. Specifically, *done my homework* has the same truth conditions regarding the result state of the complement DP as the simple transitive version of “finished”. Note the contradiction in (22)b.

- (22) a. I didn’t finish my fries, but I’m done with them.
b. #I didn’t finish my fries, but I’m done them.

Moreover, speakers from Philadelphia that we have consulted, when asked if (23)a&b have different meanings, remark that they serve different discourse functions.

- (23) a. Are you done with your fries?
b. Are you done your fries?

Speakers report that (23)a is a request to eat some of the necessarily remaining fries, whereas (23)b is simply information-seeking, and is appropriate in a context where no complete fries are left.

This telic entailment, that the complement DP must be in a ‘finished’ or ‘done’ state in the *done my homework* construction, places restrictions on the complement DP which are absent with *with*. If a bare plural or mass DP is used as the complement, this leads to a generic interpretation which is incompatible with the relevant telic interpretation. The result is ungrammaticality in the *done my homework* construction, but not in (24)a or (25)a, since the construction with *with* does not have the same telic entailment.

- (24) a. John is finished with coffee. (He'll only drink tea for the rest of his life.)
 b. *John is finished coffee. (He'll only drink tea for the rest of his life.)
- (25) a. John is finished with books. (He'll only read magazines from now on.)
 b. *John is finished books. (He'll only read magazines from now on.)

This restriction is predicted by the complement coercion account we outline below. Pustejovsky & Bouillon (1995:137) have shown that the same constraint holds in other cases of complement coercion.

While the foregoing evidence clearly rules out the possibility that *done my homework* contains a silent counterpart of *with*, it is arguably compatible with the weaker hypothesis that some silent preposition not synonymous with *with* is present in the construction, perhaps one with no overt counterpart in English⁷. The syntactic evidence to be reviewed in the next few paragraphs will rule out even this, however.

The first piece of evidence comes from the behavior of *though*-movement (see Ross (1967/1986:242) for some discussion of this process). When *though*-movement affects an Adjective Phrase containing a PP complement, English allows this PP complement to be stranded (it may also be pied-piped, of course).

- (26) a. Proud though John is [_{AP} ~~proud~~ [_{PP} of his daughter]]...
 b. Angry though John is [_{AP} ~~angry~~ [_{PP} with his daughter]]...
 c. Done though John is [_{AP} ~~done~~ [_{PP} with his computer]]...

One adjective that robustly allows a DP rather than a PP complement is *worth*. We can see that DP complements inside an aP cannot be stranded under *though*-movement in the same way that PP complements can.

- (27) a. [_{AP} Worth [_{DP} the money]] though this may be ~~worth the money~~...
 b. *Worth though this may be [_{AP} ~~worth~~ [_{DP} the money]]...

⁷ We would like to thank Brooke Larson (pers. comm.) for pointing this out to us. See also B. Larson (2013).

If we now turn to the aP headed by *done* or *finished* in the *done my homework* construction, we find that it is impossible to leave the complement behind under *though*-movement- exactly as we would expect if that complement is a simple DP, rather than a PP.

- (28) a. [_{ap} {Finished/done} [_{DP} his homework]] *though* John may be {~~finished/done~~
his homework}....
b. *{Finished/done} *though* John may be [_{ap} ~~finished/done~~ [_{DP} his homework]]...

The second piece of syntactic evidence which appears to rule out the presence of a silent preposition in the *done my homework* construction exploits Williams' (1978) Law of the Co-ordination of Likes (we would like to thank Brooke Larson for suggesting this test to us (see also B. Larson 2013)). If the complement in the *done my homework* construction were a PP, it would be possible to co-ordinate it with another PP containing an overt P head. If, on the other hand, the complement is just a DP and has no P layer, then we expect such an attempt at co-ordination to yield ungrammaticality. The fact is that it is impossible to co-ordinate the complement in a *done my homework* construction with an uncontroversial PP.

- (29) *I am done my drink and with my fries.

Having dismissed the idea that *done my homework* might contain a silent preposition which could license the DP complement, in the next subsection we examine the hypothesis that the construction instead involves a silent embedded verb. This hypothesis, too, turns out to be untenable.⁸

⁸ An abstract reviewer for PLC 37 claims that the DP complement in the *done my homework* construction is not readily extractable (giving evidence from a native Philadelphian speaker who rejected *what are you done* and *this is the homework that I'm done*), and asks if this might be an argument for a null P, assuming one could motivate the claim that the complements of null Ps cannot be extracted. We disagree on the factual claim. Our speakers (including the first author of this paper, who is a native speaker) accept all sorts

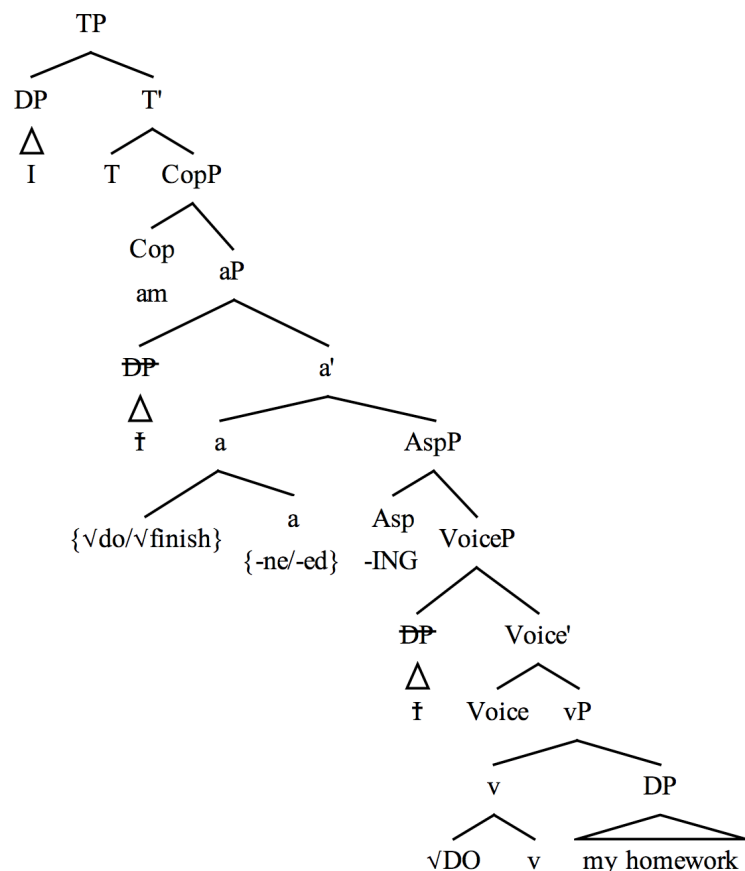
3.2 The participle in *done my homework does not embed a silent VP*

A plausible hypothesis, given the complementation possibilities of *do* and *finish*, is that sentences like (30) involve a silent transitive verb embedded under this participle, along lines that we can see overtly in sentences like (31).

- (30) I'm {done/finished} my fries.
 (31) I'm {done/finished} eating my fries.

If true, then the VoiceP associated with this silent verb could straightforwardly assign Case to the DP complement.

- (32) Hypothetical silent embedded verb structure for *done my homework* (to be rejected)



of extraction in this construction, and spontaneously produced examples can be found on the internet. As an example, take the following, posted on Twitter (not by the first author) on 14th January 2013:
 (i) “I’m done all the things I need to be done this week in order to work on my thesis. Let’s see how much work I get done on my thesis.”

Our argument against this structure will be taken from Pylkkänen (2008) concerning sentences like *John began the book*. Pylkkänen (2008) argues extensively that there is no evidence that such structures involve a hidden verb phrase introducing an event which *begin* takes as its semantic argument, and that this analysis would give rise to certain expectations concerning adverbial modification and event anaphora which are not met. Instead, she ultimately proposes (following earlier work including Egg 2003; Jackendoff 1997; Pustejovsky & Bouillon 1995; many others) that the complement of *begin* and similar verbs is syntactically a simple DP, which is semantically coerced into denoting an event. We believe that such semantic complement coercion is also at work in the *done my homework* construction. Importantly, as we will show in detail below (and as Pylkkänen 2008 also showed), the crucial diagnostic does not uniformly produce negative results for putative silent VPs (in particular, it gives positive results for the presence of such hidden structure in the complements of *want* and *need*), so we will take the negative results here to indicate the absence of a silent VP.

Embedded VPs are usually modifiable by adverbs of various sorts, and this is clearly true when *done* or *finished* takes an overt VP complement, as in (33)a. However, no such adverbial modification is possible in the *done my homework* construction, as shown in (33)b.

- (33) a. I am {done/finished} reading the book page by page. (I'll skim from now on.)
 b. *I am {done/finished} the book page by page. (I'll skim from now on.)

In contrast, work by Larson, den Dikken & Ludlow (1996) argues for the presence of hidden verbal substructure embedded under *want* and *need* in part on the basis of the fact that this silent structure is, in fact, modifiable by adverbials (like the underlined PP in

(34)).⁹ Hence, there is every reason to expect that (33)b would have come out grammatical if *done my homework* really did contain a silent VP.

(34) A week ago Bill {wanted/needed} [_{VP} Ø_V your apartment for a month].

We conclude that *done* and *finished* are taking a simple DP complement in these examples.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to give a fully worked-out compositional analysis of the semantics of the *done my homework* construction, the question of how our syntax might serve as the basis of such an account deserves at least some comment. Before moving on to discuss one final candidate other than *a* as a potential Case-assigner, we give a brief sketch of what such a compositional account might involve. Just as Pylkkänen (2008) concludes for verbs like *begin* when they take a DP complement, we take it that the *done my homework* construction is interpreted via a mechanism of complement coercion. This is a type-shifting operation which coerces the entity denotation of the complement DP into a set of events of which that DP is the theme (for explicit formulations of the rule of complement coercion, see especially Egg 2003; Pustejovsky & Bouillon 1995). Complement coercion is rendered necessary in the *done my homework* construction by the fact that *done* and *finished* are aspectual predicates that require a predicate of events as their first argument. Specifically, we assume that the denotation of *finished* is as follows (the denotation of *done* will be exactly analogous, and perhaps truth-conditionally indistinguishable).

(35) $\llbracket \text{finished} \rrbracket = \lambda P_{\langle s, t \rangle} . \lambda x_e . \lambda e_s . \exists e'_s . [P(e') \ \& \ \text{IN}((\text{finished}(e')), e) \ \& \ \text{state}(e) \ \& \ \text{holder}(e, x)]$

⁹ For Larson et al., this substructure is in fact an entire CP. For the sake of simplicity, we depict only a subpart of this structure here.

This denotation takes a predicate of events as its first argument, and an individual as its second, and says that that individual is the holder of a state (Kratzer 1996) in which the eventive first argument is “finished” (i.e., past its endpoint).

Since a DP like *my homework* denotes an individual rather than a predicate of events, a sentence like *I’m finished my homework* cannot compose together directly: *my homework* is not a suitable first argument for the denotation in (35). Therefore, this DP is coerced into a suitable first argument for (35) by the rule of complement coercion instantiated in (36).

$$(36) \quad \iota x_e.[\text{my-homework}(x)] \Rightarrow \lambda e_s.[P(e) \ \& \ \text{theme}(e, \text{my-homework})]$$

In (36), *P* is an underspecified event modifier. We will assume that *P* is restricted to being telic (cf. the discussion of example (21), where an atelic interpretation like “use the computer” is impossible, but a telic interpretation in which the computer is an incremental theme, as in “build the computer”, is fine). This idea is anticipated by Pustejovsky & Bouillon (1995:136), when they note that complement coercion examples have to be interpreted as involving telic change-of-state events (“transitions”, in their terminology). The exact content of *P* in a given utterance (whether it is understood as events of eating, drinking, building, writing, or events of any other sort) will be determined partly by context and partly by the speaker/hearer’s world knowledge about the denotatum of the complement DP. For example, our knowledge that fries are generally eaten will usually cause cases like *he’s done his fries* to involve coercion of the entity *his fries* into a set of events of eating them, unless some special context pushes the

interpretation in another direction.¹⁰ *Done* and *finished* can then take this eventive denotation and convert it into the set of states in which the event in question is at termination point. Since the complement's denotatum is understood as the theme of this telic coerced event, this will have entailments for the state of the theme itself (see Krifka 1992). Hence, in a case like *he's done his fries*, where the relevant coerced event is understood as an eating event, we get the entailment that *his fries* are in some sense “completely” eaten. This is a welcome result, as the reader will recall from our earlier discussion of (23)b. In dialects that allow *start* to occur in this construction (like the Vermont varieties discussed by Yerastov 2010), the semantics will be exactly analogous, except that the contribution of *started* will be to take the coerced eventive denotation of the DP complement and convert it into the set of states in which the event in question has passed its initiation point. The subject of this adjectival predicate (*he* in *he's done his fries*) will be interpreted as a state-holder in Kratzer's (1996) sense-- this thematic role is compatible with the meaning that the state-holder is responsible for the fact that the state holds, but it is also compatible with readings in which the subject is merely affected by the state in some other way. This explains why the subject of a *done my homework* construction need not be an agent, as we showed when discussing example (14)a.

3.3 *The copula is not the Case assigner*

¹⁰ Because complement coercion is partly a pragmatically-driven phenomenon, it is to be expected that the construction might be difficult for speakers to interpret if there is insufficient context to support the coercion of the complement DP into a suitable event. Culturally well-established events, insofar as they are automatically part of the common ground, will in effect get a “free pass” when it comes to establishing such a context (see also Egg 2003:185 for a similar point). It is therefore plausible that Yerastov's (2010b:68) finding that his consultants often found cases like *I'm done the barn* or *I'm done the hay* somewhat degraded compared to things like *I'm done my chores* is a pragmatic effect. There is no need to conclude that this effect shows that “culture may give rise to grammatical gradience”, as Yerastov (2010a:36) does; the effect in question is not syntactic in nature, but pragmatic.

So far we have considered two potential Case assigners which might have been generated below the participle *done/finished*, and shown that they cannot possibly be present in the *done my homework* construction. Here, we consider one final candidate to be found above the participle- namely, the copula itself. While the idea that the copula might be capable of assigning Case in this way may be non-standard to begin with, Lohndal (2006) gives several arguments that copulas can assign Case at least to predicate nominals, and it is for this reason that we include discussion of this possibility here.

Evidence that the copula cannot be responsible for assigning Case to the DP complement of *done my homework* is that the construction is still grammatical in certain copula-less environments, such as small clause complements to verbs like *make* and *get*, or prepositions like *with*.

- (37) a. So, you did your chemistry exam this morning. That makes *you done your exams*, right?
 b. Can you call me back when I get *my son done bath*? (Yerastov 2010b:135)
 c. With *John at long last done his homework*, we can go out and have fun!

Richard Kayne (personal communication) suggests to us that a silent copula might be present in such sentences as (37), but this can be ruled out on semantic grounds. An overt copula in the complement of *make* results in an active *be* reading (see Partee 1977; Collins 2006), but this is not a meaning that (37)a can have, and active *be* is independently somewhat degraded in conjunction with the *done my homework* construction.

- (38) a. They made me be silly to amuse the children.
 b. ??They made me be done my homework to go out and party.

We conclude that there is no plausibility to the idea that the copula is responsible for assigning Case to the internal argument in the *done my homework* construction.

3.4 Conclusion: *a is the Case licenser*

After eliminating candidates above and below *done/finished*, we conclude that *a* is the most likely remaining candidate to be the Case assigner in this construction. For *a* to assign Case in this manner is unusual for adjectives in English, but not unheard of: even in standard English dialects, the adjective *worth* takes DP complements, and presumably assigns Case to them.¹¹

- (39) a. This appliance certainly seems worth the money.
b. Reading this book is not worth my time.

We propose that the same little *a* that assigns Case to the complement of *worth* in examples like (39) is responsible for Case-assignment in the *done my homework* construction. The differences among dialects can then be conceptualized as differences in the list of roots that this Case-assigning little-*a* can select. In Philadelphia and Canada, this list contains *worth*, *do*, and *finish*. In Vermont, the list also includes *start*. In other dialects, the list contains the single item *worth*. We discuss this lexical specificity in more detail in the next section.

4. Lexical Specificity

It would be fair to ask whether it is a coincidence that it is only this cluster of roots (*worth*, *do*, *finish* and *start*) that can be selected by Case-assigning little-*a* across English

¹¹ While extremely limited in English, case assignment by adjectives is found very robustly in other languages- Maling (1983:253) names Latin, German, Icelandic, and Russian as examples. We take it that this lends plausibility to our account. Maling herself argues that "worth" is a preposition rather than an adjective (1983:268-269). We do not adopt this analysis. One reason for this is that "worth" cannot be pied-piped, a fact that Maling is unable to explain (1983:258, en 26). Secondly, Maling's main argument for the preposition analysis, concerning the patterning of 'enough', is not convincing to us. Maling reports the following judgments, apparently showing that "enough" must precede the phrase headed by "worth". As Maling points out, this is unlike clear cases of adjectives taking a complement, and exactly like a certain class of non-locative PPs (which Maling refers to as "metaphorical PPs").

- (i) Sailing is great fun, but owning your own boat isn't (enough) worth (*enough) the trouble (??enough).
- (ii) John isn't (*enough) proud (enough) of his daughter (??enough).
- (iii) Robin seems (enough) in (*enough) love (??enough).

However, we think this argument inconclusive, since not all speakers accept "enough" before "worth", and some find all combinations of "enough" and "worth" degraded.

dialects. We suspect that it is not a coincidence, although a full account will not be possible here, and in the end a certain amount of lexical specificity will have to be assumed for the time being. *Done*, *finished* and *started* are all capable of complement coercion, and all say something about some point in the temporal region occupied by a particular event. While *worth* is not aspectual in the same way, it is striking that it too is capable of complement coercion (we thank Alec Marantz for pointing this out to us).

- (40) a. It's not worth the money. (\approx spending the money)
 b. It's not worth the worry. (\approx going through the worry)

We note that this complement coercion with *worth* is similarly dependent upon context for its interpretability (see footnote 10 and surrounding text). For instance, the following example may seem degraded out of the blue.

- (41) Is it (really) worth the barn?

This sentence nevertheless becomes fine in a context where I am considering selling or otherwise sacrificing a contextually-given barn in the pursuit of some goal, and my interlocutor is trying to make me reconsider.

Worth also shares with the other forms the ability to take *-ing*-marked VP complements.

- (42) a. It's not worth wasting my time on this.
 b. It's not worth going through the worry.

A plausible conjecture is that only roots with these properties will be allowed with Case-assigning little-*a*'s cross-linguistically, but we must leave for future research the questions of whether this conjecture holds, and if so, why.

Even if this conjecture does hold, however, more will need to be said in order to explain the fact that even semantically similar roots like *complete* do not share the special

properties of *do* and *finish*. Note that, even in dialects outside of Canada, Philadelphia and Vermont, *finish* and *do* have special properties not shared by *complete* or other roots. Specifically, it is only with *finished* and *do* that external arguments to a stative passive are possible. Compare the pattern in (43) and (44).

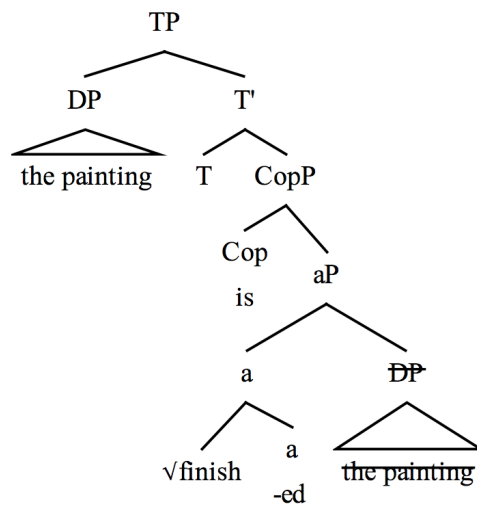
- (43) a. The painting is completed ~~the painting~~.
 b. *Mary is ~~Mary~~ completed.
 c. *Mary is ~~Mary~~ completed ~~Mary~~ painting her masterpiece.
- (44) a. The painting is finished ~~the painting~~.
 b. Mary is ~~Mary~~ finished.
 c. Mary is ~~Mary~~ finished ~~Mary~~ painting her masterpiece.

Similar comments apply to *start*, which participates in the *done my homework* construction for some Vermont speakers, in comparison with the semantically near-identical *begin*, which does not participate in the construction in any English dialect known to us.

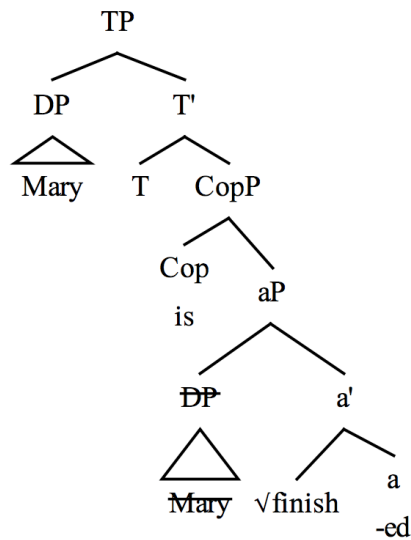
The structures for (44)a and (44)b are given below as (45)a and (45)b respectively. We can see that (44)a involves a little-*a* that does not introduce an external argument- this specifierless little-*a* head apparently is compatible with *complete*. It is our argument that (43)b is ungrammatical because the external-argument-introducing little-*a* head, which is present in (44)b, does not select for *complete*. Hence, we have a situation in which the roots that participate in a certain alternation all belong to a semantically natural class, but not all members of that class participate in the alternation, and there is moreover variation across languages/dialects as to which roots *do* participate, in a quasi-arbitrary fashion. While this situation is frustrating, it is a familiar sort of frustration in the domain of argument structure- take, for instance, the (anti-)causative alternation (manifest in doublets like *John broke the glass* vs. *the glass broke*). As is well known,

the set of verbs that undergo the (anti-)causative alternation is the semantically natural class of change-of-state verbs (Levin & Rappaport-Hovav 2005). Nevertheless, not every change-of-state verb in a given language will participate in the alternation, and there is a good deal of variation across languages and dialects in terms of which roots alternate and which do not (see Haspelmath 1993). We suspect that the lexical specificity apparent in the *done my homework* construction is of a similar sort.¹²

(45) a.



b.



¹² See also Pustejovsky & Bouillon (1995:147), who explicitly assimilate the well-known ambiguity between raising and control interpretations of verbs like *begin* to the (anti-)causative alternation.

To summarize: there is some head *a* in most dialects of English which introduces an external argument to stative passives. In most dialects, it selects only for *finish* and *do*, in others it selects only *finish*, and in still others it selects for all of *finish*, *do* and *start*. An independently varying property of this *a* head is whether or not it can assign Case to an internal argument: in the case of *finish* and *do*, it can do so only in dialects that have the *done my homework* construction. We can tell that the ability to introduce an external argument and the ability to assign Case are two properties of the same head, because in those dialects where *a* can assign Case, it does so for all and only those stative passives which are selected to have an external argument.¹³

(46)

	Montreal	Philadelphia and r.o. Canada	Vermont
I am finished.	✓	✓	✓
I am finished writing the assignment.	✓	✓	✓
I am finished my homework.	✓	✓	✓
I am done.	*	✓	✓
I am done writing the assignment.	*	✓	✓
I am done my homework.	*	✓	✓
I am started.	*	*	✓
I am started writing the assignment.	*	*	✓
I am started my homework.	*	*	✓

5. Discussion

Until such time as it is possible to directly observe syntactic primitives, identifying the precise elements involved and the functions they serve in constructions like (1) will remain fundamentally difficult. This is especially true for a language like English when the question crucially pertains to case marking. Any attempt at analysis will always

¹³ For the Montreal data in the following table, we would like to thank Gillian Sankoff (personal communication). We also thank Yuri Yerastov (personal communication) for the Vermont data.

involve using existing theory to generate hypotheses, and using the data to evaluate these generated hypotheses. In this case, the data and judgments are, at least, very clear.

The analysis we have arrived at is perhaps the structurally simplest one available. It is very close to a "what you see is what you get" (WYSIWYG) structure. Of course, structural simplicity leads to functional complications, specifically case assignment for the internal argument. Given this complication, we evaluated the immediately obvious hypotheses current theory has to offer, including

- (i) The possibility that (1) is a perfect).
- (ii) The possibility of a Voice head in (1).
- (iii) The possibility of various silent elements assigning case in (1).
- (iv) The possibility that the copula was assigning case.

On the basis of the data, we have rejected these hypotheses. To be sure, this is not a comprehensive list of alternative hypotheses to our WYSIWYG structure (that list may well be infinite), but they were the most likely ones on the basis of current theory. Given that these structural elaborations beyond (2) were not supportable by the data, we are left with choosing between the following conclusions:

- (i) (1) is a strong counter-example to current thinking about how case operates.
- (ii) Some alternative to (2) exists that is less likely than the ones rejected above.
- (iii) Some other element in (2) is marking case, besides the ones already rejected.

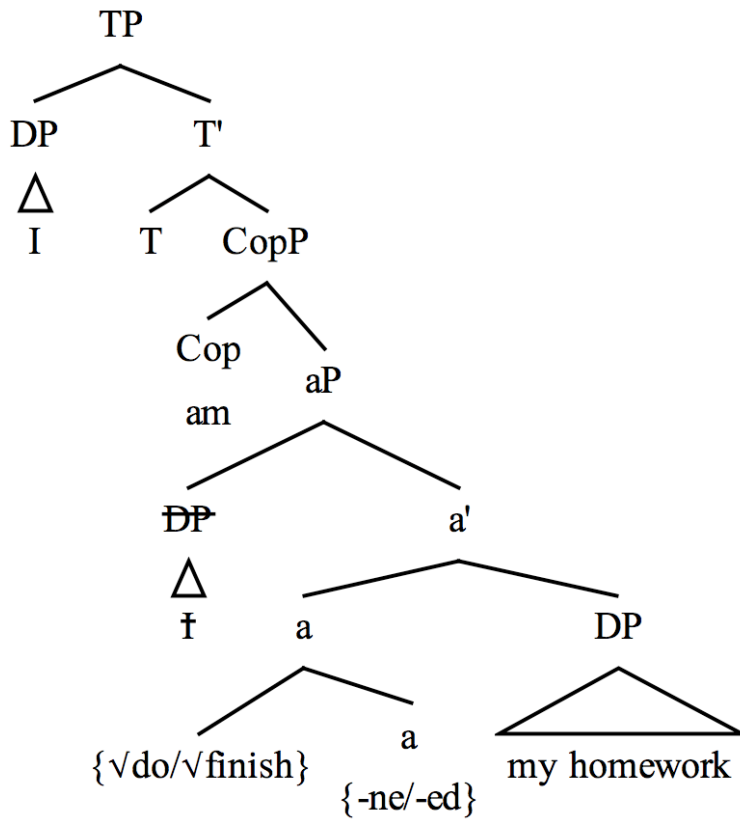
On further examination little-a appears to be a very plausible candidate for the case assigner. It can assign case to the internal argument of *worth*, and [*be worth* DP] exhibits other similarities to [*be done* DP], like was demonstrated with *though*-extraction.

Moreover, the typology of a heads that our analysis requires is precisely mirrored in the Voice domain, as will be discussed below.

6. Conclusion: mapping the microparametric space

After considering and rejecting a number of possible alternatives, we conclude that the structure in (2), repeated here as (47), is the correct one.

(47) Structure of the *done my homework* construction



We have shown that this structure correctly captures the fact that the participle in the *done my homework* construction is an adjectival passive one, not a full eventive passive or an active past participle (solving our puzzle (I)). This predicts that transitive Voice is absent, as confirmed by the lack of agentive entailments for the construction (such entailments would otherwise be expected, given that they are present in transitive clauses containing the verb roots "do" and "finish"). The external argument is instead introduced

as the subject of the adjectival predicate headed by the participle, as spec-*a*P (this answers our puzzle (ii)). The accusative Case of the internal argument is assigned by a special Case-assigning little-*a* (puzzle (iii)). We came to this conclusion after having eliminated other plausible alternative Case-assigners (we demonstrated the absence of any hidden embedded verb or preposition, and dismissed the possibility that the copula is the Case-assigner). We showed that this Case-assigning little-*a* is compatible only with roots that allow complement coercion across known English varieties, and conjectured that Case-assigning *a* is inherently restricted to this semantic class of roots in some way. However, this *a* is not compatible with all roots, and the set of roots with which it is compatible varies across Englishes-- in fact, in most dialects there is only one such root, namely *worth*. We concluded that this microparametric variation must inhere in the selectional properties of little-*a* itself, and that this situation is paralleled in the domain of the (anti-)causative alternation cross-linguistically (which shows the same combination of semantic circumscription of the set of roots that can alternate in principle, coupled with some lexical specificity in terms of which roots actually alternate and which do not across languages). Thus, our analysis also addresses the issue of the lexical specificity of the construction (puzzle (iv)).

Our conclusions suggest at least three flavors of little-*a*. Their distribution in the dialects we have studied is summarized in the following table.¹⁴

(48) Distribution of *a* heads in most dialects (including standard ones)

	external argument	Case assignment	selects
a₁	-	-	{finish, do...}
a₂	+	-	{finish, do, ...}
a₃	+	+	{worth}

¹⁴ Our head *a₁* corresponds to unaccusative adjectives. We do not discuss these in detail here (see Cinque 1990). Note, however, that *a₁* is presumably involved in the derivation of sentences like *The chicken is done, my homework is finished*, etc.

(49) Distribution of *a* heads in Montreal

	external argument	Case assignment	selects
a ₁	-	-	{finish, do}
a ₂	+	-	{finish, ...}
a ₃	+	+	{worth, finish}

(50) Distribution of *a* heads in the rest of Canada and in Philadelphia

	external argument	Case assignment	selects
a ₁	-	-	{finish, do...}
a ₂	+	-	{finish, do...}
a ₃	+	+	{worth, finish, do}

(51) Distribution of *a* heads in Vermont

	external argument	Case assignment	selects
a ₁	-	-	{finish, do, start...}
a ₂	+	-	{finish, do, start...}
a ₃	+	+	{worth, finish, do, start}

We note in passing here a partial convergence with the conclusions concerning the classification of adjectives in Bennis (2004). This convergence is intriguing because Bennis' conclusions are based on a semantically very different class of adjectives; namely, evaluative psych adjectives such as *kind*, *clever*, and others. Our a₁ head corresponds to Bennis' complex ergative class, and our a₂ corresponds to his unergative class of adjectives (there is no equivalent of our a₃ in the domain of psych adjectives- as we would predict if our conjecture that a₃ is restricted to complement coercion roots of a certain sort is on the right track). As Bennis also notes for the system he develops, the flavors of *a* we identify are paralleled in the Voice domain:

(52) Flavors of Voice

	external argument	Case assignment	selects
Voice ₁	-	-	unaccusatives
Voice ₂	+	-	unergatives
Voice ₃	+	+	transitives

The exact distribution of each head in (48)-(51) is a matter of dialect-specific selectional restrictions. Nevertheless, the space of possible variation, and the forms that variation can take, might be bounded in interesting ways if the set of roots to which a_3 could apply in principle is semantically circumscribed in the way we have conjectured it to be. Additionally, on the basis of the available dialectal variation, it appears that if a dialect can use a_3 in adjectival passives at all, it will select for all and only the same roots as a_2 in that dialect. We identify the following two predictions, which can be tested in future work on other dialects:

- (53) a. If for root X in a dialect, it can appear in the *done my homework* construction, it can also appear in the *be done Ving DP* and *I am done* constructions.
***done my homework* \rightarrow {*be done Ving DP*, *I am done*}**
- b. Contrapositively, if for a root X in a dialect, it cannot appear in *I am done* nor *be done Ving*, it cannot appear in the *done my homework* construction.
 \neg {*be done Ving DP*, *I am done*} \rightarrow \neg *done my homework*

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